

Pentecost 17 Prayers, Sunday, September 27, 2020

Celebrations

Birthday

September 28 Roy Bell

September 29 Alyssa Carnegie

Anniversary

October 3 Michael and Louise Sargeant

October 4 Bill & Danielle Ralf

Prayer Concerns

Malcolm & Donna Rust & family
of Janet Marfleet

Marietta Roberts

Mary Joan

Vince Melvin

Lillian, Gary Hartford & family

Cathy (Barrett) Tredenick

Betty Graham

Judy Jacklin

Wayne Dale

Greg Lidster

Rae Axford

Marilyn Smith

Marilyn Cartwright

Ellen's brother Bertus

Bob Bell

Jason Carnegie

Phil Doyon

Mary Underhill

Cody

Cannady Family

Sally Paul

Family & Valleyview family of Ferne

Jameson-Pell

Morning Prayer

A new season is here, one that many associate with the harvest. Let us lift up prayers for the Creation to the God of Jesus Christ, who holds the worlds together. In this extraordinary time, this time when few things stay the same, we reach out to you, Creator God, in prayer.

We know that you are with us, whether we are alone or together—

whether we are working at our office desks or our kitchen tables, or on our tractors—

whether we are praying from our front porch or on a socially distanced beach—

you find us. Like a loving Mother you lean in to listen to our words, and to the intentions of our spirits. Thank you, loving God for being THE constant in our everchanging world.

The summer has officially ended and autumn has begun! For many, autumn is a favored season: a time when the leaves change from green to golds, and reds and oranges. It's the season when the hot breezes of July dissolve into the cooler, brisk winds that will shake the leaves off branches, and force us into cozy jackets and warm jeans. It's the time when the harvest of grain and fruit are collected and combined fields are plowed. For the autumn harvests that have been sown and reaped, we thank you, God.

For students returning to their studies, and reconnections with friends and teachers--

and for a return to some semblance of routine for parents, we thank you. We pray that everyone will do their part to protect themselves and others from viruses so that schools can stay open. We do pray for those for whom this season means increased hardship. We think of those who live in parks or in their cars. O God may they be granted warm food and protection from the elements. May they and their needs not be forgotten during this time when we are distracted by pressing Covid-19 concerns. We pray for those who are living in areas ravaged by wild fires healing, restoration and renewal. and assaulted by the rage of hurricanes and storms. In this season when creation lashes out in destructive ways, may humans come together and unite to help those in need and awaken to the reality of climate change and humanity's acts of selfishness, waste and violence toward Mother Earth, and all its creatures, including people. In the words of St. Francis, make us instruments of your peace, and brothers and sisters of the creation that sustains our lives in every season. As summer folds into autumn, we pray for those who are going through some kind of transition.

We lift to you those whose health conditions have changed, those whose joys have turned to sorrow, those who have recently become widowed, separated or divorced.

God may they and we find in the promise of your presence, a source of abiding peace and a fountain of grace and acceptance that never fails them. Help us as Christ's Body to be ministering angels, offering comfort, friendship, prayers, counsel, and gifts of care, in his name.

We pray for our nation and lift up to you all our leaders, political, economic, medical, professional and religious. Bless all the front line and support workers who stand between the most vulnerable and the insidious virus that holds the planet captive right now.

May a vaccine be found and medicines and treatments developed to save lives.

Gracious God, in this transitional season, may your human family transition from being creatures of selfishness, violence, anger, and bigotry into the compassionate, caring and loving children you created us to be. Made in *your* likeness. Shaped in *your* image.

In this season may all who claim the name of Christ, who aim to walk in his footsteps, and desire to live as loving neighbors do so with courage and integrity. The joy of the Lord is our strength! In Jesus' name. Amen.

Gospel Matthew 21: 23-32

When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and

the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

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Scripture: Matthew 21: 23-32

Sermon: AUTHORITY ISSUES

Rev. Margaret Bell, Plains Baptist Church

Have you ever in some moment of your life taken issue with someone in authority? Perhaps it was a parent, or a teacher or a boss? Adolescents typically rebel against their parents at some stage in the maturing process. It's a way, experts say, of the young person becoming an individual, and differentiating themselves from a parent's control, values and identity. Was that your experience?

I have a nephew who, it seems, was born with a healthy dose of skepticism toward authority figures. From the get go he took issue with the way his teachers expected him to learn their way and obey. One of our family's favorite stories about him was when he was very little, I think he was in kindergarten or grade 1. For some reason he chose to not heed the teacher's instructions. Fed up, the teacher finally said, "Jon, how would you like to go meet the Vice Principal? Now if it had been I who had been so admonished I think I would have ducked my head and muttered, "No." My nephew, however, did not have his Auntie's chicken gene. He looked up at his teacher and stoically replied, "I don't know. I've never met the man." It's human to take issue with authority figures from time to time. It's healthy, even though I was not encouraged to think so in my youth. I was raised to not to talk back to my parents. It was impressed on me that I should obey the instructions of my teachers and respect my elders. Generally speaking, my generation was expected to trust adults, especially those in special roles like pastors, policemen, teachers and doctors.

But life experience and the stories of others also taught us that not all authority figures should be trusted or followed. And blind trust was particularly dangerous. Still is.

Sadly, we don't have to look very far to find people who use the authority of their office or position to bully, manipulate, cheat or abuse their victims. However, we also need not look far to find people who used their authority to make helpful change and protect, promote and preserve the good in human life and in the wider creation. I think of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, American Supreme Court Justice who passed away recently. She gave women and men an equal hearing, we're told, and an equal voice in law and in life. She wielded her authority carefully, thoughtfully and efficiently.

Authority is like a two-edged sword. A person can hold a place of authority due to the office or position they hold, but they may not be seen or respected by others as an authority figure if they do not use their position or power carefully, thoughtfully and efficiently.

Think of people you know who take what bit of authority they have to squeeze it for all it's worth. Think of the doctor's receptionist who tried to put you off by diagnosing you over the phone and delaying a date for your appointment. Think of political leaders who choose to insult political opponents rather than argue points of policy.

Authentic meaningful authority is earned. It's not automatic. I am grateful to God that my personal experience of authority figures who somehow abused their authority with me are relatively incidental. I have many more memories of authority figures in my life who earned those titles by the way they lived. I remember their kindness, their loving admonitions. I remember their hard work and trust in God's promises.

Think of the authority figures in your life. If you had negative and painful experiences, I hope you know that you were not deserving of that abuse. Forgiving may be the avenue you choose to take in order to free yourself of their power and take your authority back.

Now think of the authority figures who made positive contributions to your life. Think of the good advice they offered--

the listening ear they gave---

the financial resources they expended on your behalf--

the time they spent with you ---

the love they gave freely without strings attached.

Think of the authority figure who

persuaded you to make a better choice,

who taught you how to play fair---

who nursed you when you were sick.

who taught you the importance of forgiving, especially forgiving yourself--

who taught you that telling the truth and facing consequences

was better than the consequences of living with a lie--

the one who showed in times of hardship that faith in God really matters.

Take a moment to offer a silent prayer of thanks for the authority figures who blessed your life.

As you're aware, there are messy discussions going on here and in other places about issues of authority and the tactics and mindset of law makers and police services. Many are calling for systemic changes that will make us better able to protect the vulnerable and defend the disenfranchised ones. We all agree that we need to keep the peace and obey the laws.

Without authority figures who stand between us and violence and crime there would be chaos.

But when a system continues to fail its people, or authoritarian bullies oppress those that they are responsible for protecting, the victims will ultimately reject their authority. They will take that authority back for themselves. The result need not be violence or chaos. The result could be positive, redemptive change. It all depends on what kind of authority we choose to channel.

For there is more than one kind of authority out there. The pattern of authoritarian authority or power that regrettably exists in too much of the world today has always existed in some form or another. It ruled the world of Jesus.

The world of the first century was dominated by one Empire and its leader: Caesar. Leaders like Caesar know only one way to make and keep the peace and that is through acts of violent suppression. Leaders like Caesar are not into empowering the masses. Caesar ruled Palestine and would not tolerate dissent. Local leaders, religious or political had to toe the line with Rome. So, given that context, the religious leaders of Jesus' day had limited authority. They were hugely wary of anyone who would poke the bear called Rome. They were allowed some authority to keep their people contained and content enough so as to not bring the wrath of Rome down to destroy their nation and way of life.

The religious leaders were not evil people. They were people who valued what the Torah and their tradition gave them, which included prestige and some authority for preserving the spiritual survival of their people. BUT, they weren't about to recognize the authority to a desert hermit named John or Galilean faith healer named Jesus or anyone who might poke the bear or question how *they* were managing things! So, it's no surprise that they became puffed up with indignation when Jesus dared to ride into *their* city and strode into *their* territory, the Temple, to disrupt business and cause a stir.

The story we read in Matthew takes place after Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey amid cheers of *Hosanna* and cries of *Here comes the King!* Then he parades into the Temple to upset the money changers tables. The religious authorities were enraged!

How dare this bum from the Galilee interrupt the lucrative business and worship of their holy Temple! So, the chief priests and elders corner Jesus in the Temple and demand that he show them his credentials. “By what authority do you do these things?” they ask. You might imagine that this angry confrontation would terrify the regular citizen. But Jesus was not intimidated. Nor was he going to give away this authority by bowing to theirs. Instead, he answered a question with a question, putting the onus of an explanation on them. “By whose authority did John the Baptist preach? Did he receive his authority from heaven or from people?” Jesus asked. The elders felt trapped. If they answered “from heaven”, then he would say, “then why didn’t you believe him?” And if they said, “from people”, then the people who respected John’s authority as a prophet would attack them. So they refused to answer.

Matthew tells about this encounter to highlight the kind of authority Jesus embodied to the world. His authority was not derived from an inflated ego or pride of position or pose of pretense. His authority was love: love of God, love for God and love for people. His authority came directly from God, and the sad thing was that the representatives of God in God’s Holy City couldn’t, or wouldn’t see him for who he truly was.

Sometimes God’s authority shows up in the people you least expect! Sometimes it shows up in a desert prophet and a faith-healing rabbi from the Galilee! And, sometimes it shows up in the lives of the marginalized and despised. To press this point home, Jesus went on to relate a parable about a man and his two sons.

The first son refused to obey his father’s request to work in the vineyard, but later changed his mind and did as he’d been asked. The second son agreed to do what he was asked but then changed his mind or forgot or whatever. He did not keep his word. “Which did the will of his father?” Jesus asked the leaders. They answered “the first son who first refused but later changed this mind and fulfilled his father’s request.”

In this parable, Jesus was pointing out to the elders and leaders that the tax collectors and sinners who followed John and him heard what God was saying to them.

They first said “no” to God’s best for them, but when they found God’s love in John and Jesus’ messages, they changed their minds and chose to walk a new path towards a deeper relationship with God.

However, the religious leaders, though they said “Yes” to God all the time, they did not put their “yes” into redemptive actions. They were like the second son in the parable. They just kept the status quo and so missed opportunities to see what God was doing through John and Jesus, and the changed lives of the people who were drawn to them.

Suffice it to say, the religious leaders did not like this parable. And so in a very short period of time they exercised their limited authority, under Roman surveillance and Pilate’s support, to rid their city and the world of Jesus as they had John. At least, that was their intention.

But again, they misread God’s will and intentions.

On Easter Sunday, God exerted an authority that could not easily be ignored, nor ever forgotten. The risen Jesus forever validates God’s brand of kingdom authority, which is often completely opposite from the authority and powers exercised by the Caesars of this world, whether they be leaders or ordinary folks. When God’s kind of authority shows up, it makes an impact because it calls us to a different way of being and acting. It calls us to the way of justice, not just for a few

but for all, It summons us to the way of forgiveness, not just for the ones we love but for our enemies. It invites us to the way of kindness, not just for our immediate circle but for strangers. When God's brand of authority shows up, are we able to recognize it and go with it?

The global pandemic has exacerbated issues around power and authority that existed long before this virus. It has exacerbated issues of systemic injustice, racial, economic and gender inequalities. It has exacerbated the desperate situations around violence, drug abuse, poverty and crime. The pandemic has also exacerbated calls for justice to be served to those who have been invisible, ignored, or mistreated. In this time of change and challenge, voices are speaking up. They are taking their authority back.

Voices in the streets are protesting about Black lives matter. Voices in the wilderness and cities of our country are protesting that indigenous lives matter. Voices from our children are protesting that Climate change matters. In fact, a group of children have brought a suit against the Canadian government to Canada's highest court about our leaders failure to address climate issues. Will leaders recognize in their courage and youthful indignation the authority of the Creator of the Universe and of *all* creatures, large *and* small?

Every generation, including ours, every person, including us, has an authority given to us by our Creator to live, to love, to give, and to pursue peace with justice and compassion.

May we be like the first son in the parable-- we may not always get it right the first time, but praise be to God, we believe there's always enough grace in God's heart and God's kingdom for second chances! Amen

